



China in Review—VI

By William Worthy

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When the Chinese Foreign Ministry granted me permission to fly from Peking to Shanghai to see one of the American prisoners there, I started the communications wheels turning so as to make a short-wave newscast to America immediately after the interview.

China's overseas transmitters are situated in the capital. Therefore a land line, from the Shanghai broadcasting studio back to Peking, was going to be necessary. The Radio Peking "liaison" staff, the Chinese version of our Madison Av. public relations men—frankly advised me that the Shanghai equipment was obsolete, and that the land line was of uncertain quality.

"We don't know how this will work out for you," they said. "We've never done it before."

The remark was quite in keeping with a good many other admissions that I heard in China. So long as ideology is not involved, the self-assured and poised Chinese aren't impelled to boast or bluster in order to cover up deficiencies and lack of experience.

Most foreigners find it a refreshing and ingratiating quality—after the fantastic lengths to which the Russian game of make-believe is carried.

In still another way China retains her individuality within the stern camp of the proletariat. The face of the country is, of course, being made over in the image of men who believe that "political power grows out of the barrel of the gun." But not without laughter are these architects "building socialism" and carrying through the development that Chinese nationalism demands.

At a Peking dinner party I actually heard a little banter centered around the deadly serious party statement of Dec. 29.

To be sure, the banter about the party's turgid and lengthy prose was politically innocuous. But it encouraged me to test out the officials present on a comical epistle which, in Moscow, had brought only scowls to stolid Russian countenances. No officials of any of the satellites would dare to laugh at this story.

I told of the cold morning of Nov. 1, 1955, when I was in Red Square to observe the Soviets' annual parade. In and around the cluster of foreign correspondents and diplomatic corps were Russians of different walks of life: uniformed MVD men, plainclothes MVD men and ordinary militiamen.

Welles Hanger of the New York Times, who doted on making cracks about the humorless and paralytic features of the system, had on a pair of earmuffs which, with a stretch of imagination, might have passed for a set of headphones. As Soviet tanks rolled by and late-model jets buzzed overhead, Welles unbuttoned his blue lips long enough to confide in a soft whisper: "I'm talking to Allen Dulles."

The Chinese got a tremendous part of the story. Then a Foreign Ministry representative called it with one of his own. He told of a Canadian correspondent, W. Stevenson, who was traveling in an Asian country that was in disfavor on SEATO. Accompanying Stevenson on the "safari" was an elderly, innocent American woman. Stevenson had queried her native guide about the location of a military airstrip.

As soon as Stevenson was a minute alone with the woman he childed her.

"Don't you know," he was supposed to ask such questions? "Oh, no," she replied very sweetly. "I asked an Embassy told me to ask."

In any balance of relations between the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union, the Russians have had a long time to make their wife and child offerings of cultural oppression.

For families of European descent, the Russians are accustomed to a "Soviet" state, and have Peking and Shanghai. I learned that the well-paid Soviet technicians who travel back to Russia after one or two years of service, and their East European wife, couldn't get her to eat.

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In Western circles, also, the frustrations of Peking's gray monopoly have especially eroding effects on the womenfolk. The view of the standard Chinese "uniform" of blue cotton pants and high-top shoes for males and females, there are no possibilities of shopping expeditions to relieve the emotional strain. Diplomatic families also feel certain that their servants, most of whom have some knowledge of the language of the embassy, eavesdrop on conversations and spy on the minutest details of their private life.

When a Hahson scholar suddenly dropped from those of us who were being told what to think, we would have accurately known he had to live in Russia rather than in China. The eight years of the reign of Mao Tse-tung is still intensely engaged in the night-mirroring programs which Soviet leaders, no longer the messianic, after 40 years of an education and press monopoly.

Paradoxically, if you observe actual behavior in the two, the verdict is not the same. When the Chinese report of thought reform is duly weighed and examined, that seems to me to be relatively less regimented than the Soviet. Over the years the same conclusion had been reached by whom I queried. He referred to the forces promoting as being "something more than pressure and something more than the Soviet grapevine." "That we're freer than the Russians."